

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
NORTHERN DIVISION

KEVIN DWAYNE THERIOT #423068,

Case No. 2:18-cv-00092

Plaintiff,

Hon. Paul L. Maloney
U.S. District Judge

v.

JEFFREY WOODS, et al.,

Defendants.

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REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

I. Introduction

This is a civil rights action brought by state prisoner Kevin Dwayne Theriot pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Theriot filed his complaint against numerous Defendants including Defendant Dr. Chung Oh., M.D. Theriot alleges that Defendant Dr. Oh violated his Eighth Amendment right to receive medical care while he was confined at the Baraga Correctional Facility.

Defendant Dr. Oh filed a motion for summary judgment (ECF No. 69) arguing that Theriot failed to exhaust his administrative remedies prior to filing this complaint and that the medical records establish that he was not deliberately indifferent to Theriot's medical needs in violation of the Eighth Amendment. Theriot has not filed a response.

The undersigned has reviewed the materials filed by the parties. The record establishes that Theriot failed to exhaust his administrative remedies on the claims

he asserts against Defendant Dr. Oh. For that reason, it is recommended that the Court grant Defendant Dr. Oh's motion for summary judgment and dismiss him from this action without prejudice.¹

Theriot has filed motions for a temporary restraining order and a preliminary injunction. (ECF Nos. 83 and 87.) The undersigned respectfully recommends that the Court deny those requests for extraordinary relief.

II. Summary Judgment Standard

Summary judgment is appropriate when the record reveals that there are no genuine issues as to any material fact in dispute and the moving party is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. Fed. R. Civ. P. 56; *Kocak v. Comty. Health Partners of Ohio, Inc.*, 400 F.3d 466, 468 (6th Cir. 2005). The standard for determining whether summary judgment is appropriate is “whether the evidence presents a sufficient disagreement to require submission to a jury or whether it is so one-sided that one party must prevail as a matter of law.” *State Farm Fire & Cas. Co. v. McGowan*, 421 F.3d 433, 436 (6th Cir. 2005) (quoting *Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc.*, 477 U.S. 242, 251-52 (1986)). The court must consider all pleadings, depositions, affidavits, and admissions on file, and draw all justifiable inferences in favor of the party opposing the motion. *Matsushita Elec. Indus. Co., Ltd. v. Zenith Radio Corp.*, 475 U.S. 574, 587 (1986).

¹ This R&R does not address the portion of the motion requesting dismissal on the merits of Theriot's Eighth Amendment claim. The Court will address the merits of the Eighth Amendment claim, if necessary, in a subsequent R&R.

III. Exhaustion of Administrative Remedies

A prisoner's failure to exhaust his administrative remedies is an affirmative defense, which Defendants have the burden to plead and prove. *Jones v. Bock*, 549 U.S. 199, 212-16 (2007). “[W]here the moving party has the burden -- the plaintiff on a claim for relief or the defendant on an affirmative defense -- his showing must be sufficient for the court to hold that no reasonable trier of fact could find other than for the moving party.” *Calderone v. United States*, 799 F.2d 254, 259 (6th Cir. 1986). The Sixth Circuit has repeatedly emphasized that the party with the burden of proof “must show the record contains evidence satisfying the burden of persuasion and that the evidence is so powerful that no reasonable jury would be free to disbelieve it.” *Cockrel v. Shelby Cnty. Sch. Dist.*, 270 F.3d 1036, 1056 (6th Cir. 2001). Accordingly, summary judgment in favor of the party with the burden of persuasion “is inappropriate when the evidence is susceptible of different interpretations or inferences by the trier of fact.” *Hunt v. Cromartie*, 526 U.S. 541, 553 (1999).

Pursuant to the applicable portion of the Prison Litigation Reform Act (PLRA), 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(a), a prisoner bringing an action with respect to prison conditions under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 must exhaust his available administrative remedies. *Porter v. Nussle*, 534 U.S. 516, 532 (2002); *Booth v. Churner*, 532 U.S. 731, 733 (2001). A prisoner must first exhaust available administrative remedies, even if the prisoner may not be able to obtain the specific type of relief he seeks in the state administrative process. *Porter*, 534 U.S. at 520; *Booth*, 532 U.S. at 741; *Knuckles El v. Toombs*, 215 F.3d 640, 642 (6th Cir. 2000); *Freeman v. Francis*, 196 F.3d 641, 643 (6th Cir. 1999).

In order to properly exhaust administrative remedies, prisoners must complete the administrative review process in accordance with the deadlines and other applicable procedural rules. *Jones*, 549 U.S. at 218-19; *Woodford v. Ngo*, 548 U.S. 81, 90-91 (2006). “Compliance with prison grievance procedures, therefore, is all that is required by the PLRA to ‘properly exhaust.’” *Jones*, 549 U.S. at 218-19. In rare circumstances, the grievance process will be considered unavailable where officers are unable or consistently unwilling to provide relief, where the exhaustion procedures may provide relief, but no ordinary prisoner can navigate it, or “where prison administrators thwart inmates from taking advantage of a grievance process through machination, misrepresentation, or intimidation.” *Ross v. Blake*, 578 U.S. ___, 136 S.Ct. 1850, 1859-60 (2016).

“Beyond doubt, Congress enacted [Section] 1997e(a) to reduce the quantity and improve the quality of prisoner suits.” *Porter*, 534 U.S. at 524. In the Court’s view, this objective was achieved in three ways. First, the exhaustion requirement “afforded corrections officials time and opportunity to address complaints internally before allowing the initiation of a federal case.” *Id.* at 525. Second, “the internal review might ‘filter out some frivolous claims.’” *Id.* (quoting *Booth*, 532 U.S. at 737). And third, “adjudication could be facilitated by an administrative record that clarifies the contours of the controversy.” *Id.* When institutions are provided adequate notice as required under the PLRA, the opportunity to address the claims internally furthers the additional goals of limiting judicial interference with prison administration. *Baker v. Vanderark*, 2007 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 81101 at *12.

Michigan Dept. of Corrections (MDOC) Policy Directive 03.02.130 (effective on July 9, 2007, superseded on March 18, 2019), sets forth the applicable grievance procedures for prisoners in MDOC custody at the time relevant to this complaint. Inmates must first attempt to resolve a problem orally within two business days of becoming aware of the grievable issue, unless prevented by circumstances beyond his or her control. *Id.* at ¶ P. If oral resolution is unsuccessful, the inmate may proceed to Step I of the grievance process and submit a completed grievance form within five business days of the attempted oral resolution. *Id.* at ¶¶ P, V. The inmate submits the grievance to a designated grievance coordinator, who assigns it to a respondent. *Id.* at ¶ V. The Policy Directive also provides the following directions for completing grievance forms: “The issues should be stated briefly but concisely. Information provided is to be limited to the facts involving the issue being grieved (i.e., who, what, when, where, why, how). Dates, times, places and names of all those involved in the issue being grieved are to be included.” *Id.* at ¶ R (emphasis in original).

If the inmate is dissatisfied with the Step I response, or does not receive a timely response, he may appeal to Step II by obtaining an appeal form within ten business days of the response, or if no response was received, within ten days after the response was due. MDOC Policy Directive 03.02.130 at ¶¶ T, BB. The respondent at Step II is designated by the policy, *e.g.*, the regional health administrator for medical care grievances. *Id.* at ¶ DD.

If the inmate is still dissatisfied with the Step II response, or does not receive a timely Step II response, he may appeal to Step III using the same appeal form. *Id.*

at ¶¶ T, FF. The Step III form shall be sent within ten business days after receiving the Step II response, or if no Step II response was received, within ten business days after the date the Step II response was due. *Id.* at ¶¶ T, FF. The Grievance and Appeals Section is the respondent for Step III grievances on behalf of the MDOC director. *Id.* at ¶ GG.

“The total grievance process from the point of filing a Step I grievance to providing a Step III response shall generally be completed within 120 calendar days unless an extension has been approved.” *Id.* at ¶ S.

In addition, the grievance policy provides that, where the grievance alleges conduct that falls under the jurisdiction of the Internal Affairs Division pursuant to Policy Directive 01.01.140, the prisoner may file his Step I grievance directly with the inspector of the institution in which the prisoner is housed, instead of with the grievance coordinator, as set forth in ¶ W of Policy Directive 03.02.130. *Id.* at ¶ R. In such instances, the grievance must be filed within the time limits prescribed for filing grievances at Step I. *Id.* Regardless of whether the grievance is filed with the grievance coordinator or the inspector, the grievance will be referred to the Internal Affairs Division for review and will be investigated in accordance with MDOC Policy Directive 01.01.140. The prisoner will be promptly notified that an extension of time is needed to investigate the grievance. *Id.*

Where the grievance procedures are not available because the issue presented is non-grievable, exhaustion of prison grievance procedures is not required. It is well-established that a prisoner “cannot be required to exhaust administrative remedies

regarding non-grievable issues.” *Figel v. Bouchard*, 89 F. App’x 970, 971 (6th Cir. 2004); *Mays v. Kentucky Dept. of Corrections*, 2018 WL 4603153, at *3 (W.D. Ky. Sept. 25, 2018) (“It is beyond debate that an inmate cannot be required to exhaust administrative remedies regarding non-grievable issues.”); *Reeves v. Hobbs*, 2013 WL 5462147 (W.D. Ark. Sept. 3, 2013) (“Defendants cannot treat a complaint as non-grievable, and therefore not subject to the grievance procedure, and then turn around and maintain the claim fails because [the plaintiff] failed to follow the grievance procedure. As the well known proverb states, they cannot have their cake and eat it too.”).

When prison officials waive enforcement of these procedural rules and instead consider a non-exhausted claim on its merits, a prisoner’s failure to comply with those rules will not bar that prisoner’s subsequent federal lawsuit. *Reed-Bey v. Pramstaller*, 603 F.3d 322, 325 (6th Cir. 2010). The Sixth Circuit has explained:

[A] prisoner ordinarily does not comply with MDOC 130—and therefore does not exhaust his administrative remedies under the PLRA—when he does not specify the names of each person from whom he seeks relief. *See Reed-Bey v. Pramstaller*, 603 F.3d 322, 324-25 (6th Cir. 2010) (“Requiring inmates to exhaust prison remedies in the manner the State provides—by, say, identifying *all* relevant defendants—not only furthers [the PLRA’s] objectives, but it also prevents inmates from undermining these goals by intentionally defaulting their claims at each step of the grievance process, prompting unnecessary and wasteful federal litigation process.”). An exception to this rule is that prison officials waive any procedural irregularities in a grievance when they nonetheless address the grievance on the merits. *See id.* at 325. We have also explained that the purpose of the PLRA’s exhaustion requirement “is to allow prison officials ‘a fair opportunity’ to address grievances on the merits to correct prison errors that can and should be corrected to create an administrative record for those disputes that eventually end up in court.” *Id.* at 324.

Mattox v. Edelman, 851 F.3d 583, 590-91 (6th Cir. 2017).²

Theriot failed to exhaust his administrative remedies by filing a grievance naming Defendant Dr. Oh prior to filing this complaint. The record establishes that Theriot never filed a grievance that was related to his health care. (ECF No. 69-5, PageID.578-581.)

IV. Injunctive Relief

Theriot filed a health care request form saying that he is in imminent danger of sexual assault from the staff at Baraga Correctional Facility and that he is illegally being held in segregation. (ECF No. 83.) Theriot also filed a motion for a preliminary injunction and a temporary restraining order for health care due to blood in his feces that he says may lead to coma or death. (ECF No. 87.)

Preliminary injunctions are “one of the most drastic tools in the arsenal of judicial remedies.” *Bonnell v. Lorenzo*, 241 F.3d 800, 808 (6th Cir. 2001) (quoting *Hanson Trust PLC v. ML SCM Acquisition Inc.*, 781 F.2d 264, 273 (2d Cir. 1986)). The issuance of preliminary injunctive relief is committed to the discretion of the district court. *Ne. Ohio Coal. v. Blackwell*, 467 F.3d 999, 1009 (6th Cir. 2006); *Nader v. Blackwell*, 230 F.3d 833, 834 (6th Cir. 2000).

In exercising that discretion, a court must consider whether plaintiff has established the following elements: (1) a strong or substantial likelihood of success on

² In *Mattox*, the Sixth Circuit held that a prisoner may only exhaust a claim “where he notifies the relevant prison . . . staff” regarding the specific factual claim “giving the prison staff a fair chance to remedy a prisoner’s complaints.” *Id.* at 596. For example, grieving a doctor about his failure to give cardiac catheterization failed to grieve the claim that the doctor erred by not prescribing Ranexa.

the merits; (2) the likelihood of irreparable injury if the preliminary injunction does not issue; (3) the absence of harm to other parties; and (4) the protection of the public interest by issuance of the injunction. *Id.* These factors are not prerequisites to the grant or denial of injunctive relief, but factors that must be “carefully balanced” by the district court in exercising its equitable powers. *Frisch’s Rest., Inc. v. Shoney’s, Inc.*, 759 F.2d 1261, 1263 (6th Cir. 1985); *see also Ne. Ohio Coal.*, 467 F.3d at 1009.

Moreover, where a prison inmate seeks an order enjoining state prison officials, the court is required to proceed with the utmost care and must recognize the unique nature of the prison setting. *Glover v. Johnson*, 855 F.2d 277, 284 (6th Cir. 1988); *Kendrick v. Bland*, 740 F.2d 432, 438 n.3 (6th Cir. 1984). The party seeking injunctive relief bears a heavy burden of establishing that the extraordinary and drastic remedy sought is appropriate under the circumstances. *Overstreet v. Lexington-Fayette Urban Cnty. Gov’t*, 305 F.3d 566, 573 (6th Cir. 2002); *Stenberg v. Cheker Oil Co.*, 573 F.2d 921, 925 (6th Cir. 1978).

Under controlling Sixth Circuit authority, Theriot’s “initial burden” in demonstrating entitlement to preliminary injunctive relief is a showing of a strong or substantial likelihood of success on the merits of his section 1983 action. *NAACP v. Mansfield*, 866 F.2d 162, 167 (6th Cir. 1989). Theriot has not made such a showing. A review of the materials of record fails to establish a substantial likelihood of success with respect to Theriot’s underlying claims. In addition, Theriot has failed to support his claim that any Defendant denied him adequate medical care.

A plaintiff's harm from the denial of a preliminary injunction is irreparable only if it is not fully compensable by monetary damages. *Overstreet*, 305 F.3d at 578. Theriot has failed to assert factors that establish that he will suffer irreparable harm in the absence of an injunction.

Finally, in the context of a motion impacting on matters of prison administration, the interests of identifiable third parties and the public at large weigh against the granting of an injunction. Any interference by the federal courts in the administration of state prison matters is necessarily disruptive. The public welfare therefore militates against the issuance of extraordinary relief in the prison context, absent a sufficient showing of a violation of constitutional rights. *Glover v. Johnson*, 855 F.2d 277, 286-87 (6th Cir. 1988). That showing has not been made here.

V. Recommendation

The undersigned respectfully recommends that this Court grant Defendant Dr. Oh's motion for summary judgment (ECF No. 69) and dismiss Defendant Dr. Oh, without prejudice, from this case.

It is further recommended that the Court deny Theriot's motions for preliminary injunctions and temporary restraining orders (ECF Nos. 83 and 87.)

Dated: February 18, 2020

/s/ Maarten Vermaat
MAARTEN VERMAAT
U. S. MAGISTRATE JUDGE

NOTICE TO PARTIES

Any objections to this Report and Recommendation must be filed and served within fourteen days of service of this notice on you. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C); FED. R. CIV. P. 72(b). All objections and responses to objections are governed by W.D. Mich. LCivR 72.3(b). Failure to file timely objections may constitute a waiver of any further right of appeal. *United States v. Walters*, 638 F.2d 947 (6th Cir. 1981); see *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140 (1985).